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RETHINKING CONSERVATION COMMUNICATION IN RURAL AFRICA: A CASE FOR INDIGENOUS AFRICAN COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS (IACS)

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Abstract
Given the critical role the media play in public education and enlightenment in modern societies, it is likely there will be the temptation to depend on them for the success of conservation communication in rural areas. But a major problem with this approach is that the gospel of conservation may not resonate with majority of rural dwellers, especially in the African continent where a lot of rural people appear to depend on the forest for food and livelihood (Collaborative Partnership on Forest, 2012). Considering that the rural poor in the continent are unlikely to have access to the mainstream mass media and the new media (Mtega, 2012), it is important that alternative information channels and media are employed in communicating the benefits of conservation to them. Using rural Nigeria as a case study, this article analyses the shortcomings and challenges of conservation communication in rural Africa. It explores the use of Indigenous African Communication Systems (IACS) in making conservation information meaningful for rural people and concludes that appreciating the peculiarities of rural people and their communication environment is important in effective conservation communication in rural Africa.

Keywords: *Biodiversity, Conservation, Environment, Indigenous African communication systems, Mass media*

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MEMIKIRKAN SEMULA TENTANG PEMELIHARAAN KOMUNIKASI DI PENDALAMAN AFRIKA: SATU KAJIAN KES SISTEM KOMUNIKASI ORANG ASLI AFRIKA.

Abstrak
Melihat pada peranan penting yang dimainkan oleh media dalam pendidikan dan pencerahan awam dalam masyarakat moden, ada kemungkinan terdapat pengaruh untuk bergantung pada media demi kejayaan pemeliharaan komunikasi di daerah pendalaman. Namun masalah utama pendekatan ini adalah niat murni pemeliharaan mungkin tidak sehaluan dengan kebanyakan penghuni kawasan pendalaman, terutamanay di benua Afrika dimana ramai penghuni nya amat bergantung pada kehidupan hutan untuk mendapatkan makanan dan kehidupan (Collaborative Partnership on Forest, 2012). Dengan anggapan penghuni miskin di benua tersebut tidak mungkin mendapat akses pada media massa perdana dan media baru (Mtega, 2012), maka adalah penting rangkaian maklumat alternatif dan media di gunakan dalam memaklumatkan kebaikan pemeliharaan kepada mereka. Dengan menggunakan pedalaman Nigeria sebagai kajian kes, artikel ini menganalisis kekurangan dan cabaran pemeliharaan komunikasi di pedalaman Afrika. Ia meneroka penggunaan Indigenous African Communication Systems (IACS) dalam membuat pemeliharaan maklumat lebih bermakna untuk penghuni pendalaman dan satu kesimpulan boleh dibuat iaitu menghargai keunikan penghuni pendalaman dan persekitaran komunikasi mereka adalah penting untuk berkomunikasi dengan lebih berkesan di pendalaman Afrika.

Kata kunci: *Biodiversiti, pemeliharaan, persekitaran, Sistem Komunikasi Orang Asli Afrika, media massa.*

INTRODUCTION

The quest for improved living standard in the world has resulted in the destruction of biodiversity. The importance of biodiversity to the humankind calls for concerted efforts in protecting and conserving it. Indeed, biodiversity provides numerous essential services to society, including "material goods (for example, food, timber, medicines, and fibre), underpinning functions (flood control, climate regulation, and nutrient cycling), and nonmaterial benefit such

as recreation" (Rands, et al, 2010, 1298).

The challenge of conservation is perhaps even greater for developing countries where industrialisation efforts appear to have combined with hunger and poverty to heighten the destruction of some of nature's endowment. Sadly, the situation appears worse in Africa, a continent that majority of its population live in rural areas (United Nations, 2012). Africa has a large number of chronically hungry people (FAO, 2008) and also accounts for 30 per cent of the world's poor (World Bank, 2013). This situation has put pressure on biodiversity, as deforestation or the selective exploitation of forests for economic or social reasons has become common in the continent with huge losses being recorded in vegetation, and wildlife.

One of the best ways of promoting conservation is to raise awareness on the importance and benefits of preserving biodiversity. People are likely to make conservation a way of life when they understand that the protection and preservation of biodiversity can be crucial to their future. This is especially true for rural people in Africa who may understand the importance of biodiversity – because most of them depend on it for their livelihood- but may not understand that exploiting it indiscriminately can affect the future of humankind. Conservationists tend to employ the mass media and the new media of internet to create this kind of awareness. But using these media to enhance public awareness and involvement in environmental conservation, as Ojo and Kadri (2001) have suggested, can be detrimental to conservation, given that the media in Africa rarely give attention to environmental issues (Nwabueze, 2007). The situation is likely to be worse when the rural poor, who are usually marginalised by the mainstream media in Africa (White, 2008), are the target audience.

This article uses Nigeria as a case study to examine the current conservation communication situation in Africa, with particular attention to rural people. Because there is ample evidence to suggest that the mass media in Africa do not focus much attention on development issues but mainly serve the interest of the urban elites (Ate and Ikerodah, 2012; Oso, 1993; Boafo, 1985), the article argues that there is need to use other available alternative media and communication channels to take the message of biodiversity conservation to rural Africans. Consequently, the article explores the use of Indigenous African Communication Systems (IACS) in making conservation information meaningful to people in rural Africa.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Africa's perennially low standard of living has led a large majority of its population into seeing hunting of animals and illegal logging as livelihood. Certainly, protection and conservation of forest resources mean nothing to the poor and hungry. But survival means everything to such people – even if it will take the destruction of biodiversity. Taylor (2009) aptly captures the conservation challenge facing Africa this way:

The problem of environmental conservation affects the continent of Africa in different ways to other continents. In developed counties the concept of conservation is often motivated by concern for the future or on possible health problems that may arise from exposure to pollution. In a continent where survival for many is a daily struggle, concern for pollution and health are not as great. Due to the fact that the governments of third world counties are often fighting a war on poverty and disease, they have not been able to put very much attention on the subject of the environment. This situation is now itself growing into an intolerable situation.

The need to protect and preserve biodiversity is even more urgent now that global warming and climate change are threatening human existence. Scientists say that "current and future climate change will impact forests, wetlands, rivers, and coastal areas, as well as the human communities that depend upon them" (Wilson and Hebda 2008, v). Nigeria, for example, will be affected in ways such as: increased incidence of floods, drought, desertification and inability to tackle illness through the extinction of plant species used in the preparation and administration of traditional medicines (Olatubosun 2010). Fortunately, conservation can be a strategy for mitigating climate change and adapting to its potential impacts. According to Wilson and Hebda (2008, VII) "the protection of healthy, functioning and diverse ecosystems provides resilience for natural areas and nearby human communities and reduces the risk of rapid changes and loss of ecosystem values and services".

With a population of over 170 million Nigeria is Africa's most populous country . The country's total land area is 983,213 Km2 with 773,783km2 in the savannah zones, 75,707km2 in the derived savannah zones and 133,717km2 in the forest zone. This gives an average density of over 120 persons per square kilometre. While this density may vary from one region to another, it is evident that Nigeria already has high population density (Omofonmwan and Osa-Edoh, 2008).

The interaction of this large number of people with the environment has indeed impacted the country's ecosystems in some negative ways. The impact manifests itself in deforestation, desertification, overpopulation and all kinds of pollution (Omofonmwan and Osa-Edoh, 2008).

Indeed, Nigeria is endowed with rich and unique range of ecosystems and a great variation in natural resources (Meduna , Ogunjinmi and Onadeko, 2009, 60) which have evolved a diversity of fauna and flora sustaining a large number of plant and animal species. According to the Nigeria's First National Biodiversity report 2001, there are about 7895 plant species identified in 338 families and 2,215 genera. There are 22, 000 vertebrates and invertebrates species. These species include about 20, 000 insects, about 1000 birds, about 1, 000 fishes, 247 mammals and 123 reptiles. Of these animals; 0.14 per cent is threatened while 0.22 per cent is endangered. About 1,489 species of micro-organisms have also been identified. All these animal and plant species occur in different numbers

within the country's vegetation that range from the mangrove along the coast in the South to the Sahel in the North (referenced in Emma – Okafor, Ibeabuchi and Obiefuna 2009, p.81).

Unfortunately, the country's ecosystems have continued to be destroyed, resulting in massive depletion of its biodiversity. For example, the Nile crocodile (Crocodylus niloticus) once found in the Nigerian coastal waters right up to Lake Chad, is fast disappearing due to loss of habitat and the hunting of the crocodile for their meat, eggs and hide (Imeh and Adebobola, 2009). In the southern part of the country, the forest elephant, chimpanzee, leopard, yellow-backed duiker, the royal python and the Nigeria guenon (Cercophithecus erythorgaster) are among the animals on the endangered list. In fact, forestry experts have reported that about 65 of Nigeria's 560 species of trees are now faced with extinction while many others are at different stages of risk (Imeh and Adebobola, 2009).

The country's deforestation rate is about 3.5 per cent annually, translating to a loss of 350,000 - 400,000 ha of forest land per year (Ladipo, 2010). Studies show that forests occupy just about 10 million ha, which is just about 10 per cent of the country's forest land area and well below FAO's recommended national minimum of 25 per cent. Between 1990 and 2005 alone, the world lost 3.3per cent of its forests while Nigeria lost 21per cent (Ladipo, 2010). Recent studies, however, indicate that the situation has worsened. The 2010 Global Forest Resources Assessment of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) estimates Nigeria's annual forest net loss for 2000 – 2010 at (-) 3.7 per cent. By this, Nigeria is the country with the largest annual net loss for 2000–2010 after Comoros (-9.3 percent) and Togo (-5.1 per cent).

To stem the tide of biodiversity loss, governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), Federal Ministry of Environment, Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA), National Parks, the National Resources Council (NARECO) in collaboration with the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the World Wide Fund (WWF), and several other agencies have embarked on numerous projects aimed at preserving the country's biodiversity (Imeh and Adebobola, 2009). However, not much has been achieved as Nigeria has kept losing its forests, wildlife and plant species.

Beyond Nigeria's huge population, the high level of poverty and huge income inequality in the country (Holmes et al 2012; UNDP 2011) also contribute in depleting its biodiversity. The link between poverty and biodiversity has been widely acknowledged; hence it is recognized in the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD). In 2002 the convention targeted 'to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth' (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2002).

A large number of Nigeria's poor reside and work in the rural areas (Imeh and Adebobola, 2009). Living conditions of rural areas in Africa in general leave

much to be desired. The pitiable condition of rural Africa, particularly Nigeria, has been described in Umannah (1993), Udoakah (1998), Porter (2002) and Garuba (2006). The rural poor contribute immensely to biodiversity depletion, as "they often depend on it for their income as well as a wide range of natural resources and ecosystem services essential for their well-being" (Billé, Lapeyre and Pirard 2012, 1). Unfortunately, the rural people may not know that they are exploiting biodiversity to their own detriment. And if this continues they will have "little or nothing to exploit for income to take care of their food, clothing and shelter needs" (Agbogidi and Ofuoku 2006, 104).

This does not, however, mean that activities of the urban rich do not contribute to biodiversity depletion. But the point being made here is that the poor, as Roe and Elliott (2005) observe, appear to be particularly dependent (although this is hard to quantify) on biodiversity. They note that "a large part this dependency is related to the role that biodiversity plays in poor people's farming systems and the degree of resilience and adaptability to environmental change that poor people have developed"(referenced in Billé, Lapeyre and Pirard 2012, 8).

To protect the ecosystem, however, the public has to be aware of the benefits accruing from that. As Nwosu (1993) and Timberlake (1985) points out, negative environmental behaviour in Africa has been attributed to minimal environmental awareness and ultimately to poor media coverage of environmental issues. Certainly, a good way of promoting conservation is to raise awareness on the importance and benefits of preserving the forests resources. This is especially important in rural areas in Africa where destruction of forest resources is rife. There is indeed need for meaningful engagement with rural people. This, no doubt, is the province of communication. Unfortunately, despite the centrality of communication in the conservation of the ecosystems, there appears to be very few studies in conservation communication in Africa. This area of study, it appears, is subsumed under the larger field of environmental communication where studies seem to by increasing by the day (cf: Nwabueze 2011; Ashong and Udoudo 2006; Oso, 2006); Olatunji 2004). This article is, therefore, an effort to fill the gap in research in conservation communication in Nigeria, particularly in rural Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed interviews to gather data. Interviews "yield rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings" (May 2001, 120). Journalists and rural dwellers were interviews in the Nigerian states of Lagos and Enugu respectively in May 2013. In addition, a senior officer of a Non-Governmental Organisation was interviewed in Owerri, Imo State within the same period. The journalists were interviewed with a view to finding out the importance the mainstream mass media in Nigeria attach to environmental issues generally. However, the rural dwellers were interviewed with a view to understanding the rural information networks and finding out how

accessible the mass media are to them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current state of Nigeria's biodiversity calls for the creation of awareness on the benefits of conservation. There is need for an integrated communication strategy that will enhance public awareness on conservation in both urban and rural areas. Current conservation communication efforts are not likely to be successful in increasing public awareness especially in rural areas.

For example, a 2011 document, Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of the Nigeria-Cameroon Chimpanzee (Pan troglodytes ellioti), indicates that both countries are relying on the mass media to create awareness for the conservation of a species of chimpanzee. The document believes that the popularity of radio in remote villages and "the increasingly ubiquitous televisions and internet access allow for new opportunities in conveying information on both local and national scales" (Morgan et al. 2011, 13). Observing that "conservation NGOs and wildlife sanctuaries tend to use media internationally as a fund-raising tool, the document advocated a "move towards informing the general public about con¬servation initiatives within Cameroon and Nigeria" (Morgan et al. 2011, 13).

This approach to conservation communication is unlikely to be successful. First, it relies heavily on 'conveying information on both local and national scales'. Certainly, the public need conservation information to develop interest in conservation, but information alone may not be enough in helping people understand the crux of the issues involved. "Information is just data which is more or less a passive commodity with little inherent value unless it enriches one or more of its recipients, either in terms of knowledge or in some other, material way" (FAO and GTZ 2006, 4). Communication, however, goes beyond information promotion; it is a two-way process. Most importantly,

It is about fostering social awareness and facilitating public democratic dialogue. It is about contributing to evidence-based policy, and about building a shared understanding which can lead to social change. It is about creating space for the voices of the poor to be heard, and, ultimately, it is about redistributing power (Hovland 2007, 1).

Another issue with this approach is the assumption that the mass media will give adequate coverage to conservation issues. Indeed, the mass media in Africa have been more interested in promoting the interests of the elites and care less about improving the lives of the majority of the citizens through their reports and programmes (Boafo, 1985; Oso, 1993; White 2008). Besides, for various reasons, which will be discussed later, many rural people in Africa are not carried along whenever enlightenment campaigns are mainly carried out through the mass media.

The Nigerian National Policy on the Environment is also vague on communication. There are two areas bearing on communication in the document:

education and public participation. Under education, the policy notes among other things that government shall:

> adopt community based approaches to public education and enlightenment through culturally relevant social groups, voluntary associations and occupational organisations ...collaborate with media, entertainment and advertising agencies in enhancing environmental awareness...promote public awareness activities through traditional and mass media and NGO participation structures to keep them informed about all aspects of the policy (FEPA 1998, 30).

Under public participation, the policy notes that the government shall:

> engage mass and folk media at all levels in the task of public enlightenment ... boost environmental awareness and education through the involvement of indigenous social structures, voluntary associations and occupational organizations....and also grant the citizenry access to environmental information and data thereby promoting the quality of environmental management and compliance monitoring (FEPA 1998, 44).

It is laudable that those who drafted the policy appreciate the need to use the mass media and the traditional/folk media in conservation communication. However, it appears that there is something wrong with the implementation of the policy, given that studies have continued to report low environmental awareness in Nigeria (Ogunjinmi, Onadeko and Ogunjinmi 2013; Afangideh, Obong and Robert, 2012). Nonetheless, the policy tends to be vague on certain issues. For instance, what does it mean by community-based approach? Which medium or combination of media would be used to communicate to the rural people? How would conservation information be made meaningful to rural people? Which language would be used to communicate to rural people – English or local languages? How would experts be trained to communicate in local languages? How would conservation jargons be made meaningful for the uneducated rural dweller? Will the experts who will educate the rural dwellers come from the urban areas or will rural school teachers be trained specifically for that purpose? These are many of such ambiguities in the policy.

The NGOs also tend to make this same mistake. For example, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation carries out environmental education and awareness programmes in primary and secondary schools but mainly in those one located in the cities. However, it uses the internet (especially its website, http://www.ncfnigeria.org) to reach a wider audience. But given the very low internet penetration in Nigeria (Osang, 2012) and the erratic (or absence of) electricity in most rural areas in Nigeria, using the internet to take the gospel of conservation to rural people will be a complete mismatch of media and audience.

Obviously, these documents indicate an overreliance on the mass media and

the new media and this does not seem to be given conservation communication the needed push in the rural areas. Conservation communicators, therefore, need to heed to Mushengyezi's (2003, 107) warning that:

such communication strategies often do not impact on the rural masses for which they are meant because they are not 'contextualized' to the local settings, cultural dialectics and worldview of the people. The bulk of the rural people are non-literate, poor and have little or no access to modern mass media such as television, radio, film, newspapers, the internet and email.

Clearly, the peculiar circumstance of rural people in Nigeria call for strategic thinking in communicating with them. The rural economy is generally weak and most rural areas lack basic social amenities like electricity and potable water (Meribe, 2013). Rural people face 'extreme survival crises during rains, sun, wind, storms, hurricane and harmattan, blizzards and draught …Psychologically speaking, the disadvantaged rural people in Nigeria exist within a context of helplessness and hopelessness' (Umanah 1993, 163 - 164)).

Indeed, poverty level in rural areas in Nigeria limits rural peoples' access to the mass media and the internet (Brieger, 1990). Worse still, the mainstream media in the country also have a bias for urban areas (Ate and Ikerodah, 2012) and tend to privilege the urban elite but marginalise the rural poor. Consequently, it will be counterproductive to rely on the mass media for successful communication of conservation information to rural people. White (2008, 7) would agree with this, hence he observes that:

There is a huge communication gap between the modernised elite sector and the majority who live in peasant farming, informal economy or on the verge of survival. If the modernised sector has a wealth of newspapers, magazines and better broadcasting, little of this 'wealth' of information reaches the grassroots.

Moreover, much of the public funded mass media in Africa has not been used to promote issues (like conservation) which have a bearing on the well being of the populace. Rather, they have been used to promote the interests of the political elites. Indeed, various studies have also revealed that the media in Africa tend to attach little importance to issues that bear on the environment. Studies by Oso, (2006) Nwabueze (2007), Okoro & Nnaji (2012) found that the Nigerian newspapers give little coverage to environmental issues., In their study, 'Media coverage of nature conservation and protection in Nigeria National Parks', Ogunjinmi, Onadeko and Ogunjinmi (2013), found that the coverage given to Nigeria National Parks nature conservation and protection efforts (both print and electronic) by Nigerian media was low. Obviously, the poor coverage contributes to the low public awareness of these issues as indicated in a study by Afangideh, Obong and Robert (2012). It also goes to confirm the observations of Boafo (1985), Oso (1993), Adeniyi and Bello (2006) and White (2008) that the media in Africa rarely focus attention on development issues.

It is, however, important to point out that the low media coverage may have little effect on rural people's appreciation of conservation not just because their

economic circumstances limit their access to the mass media but because the media rarely carry them along through their programmes and programming. So, it will be futile to rely on them to effectively communicate conservation to rural people in Nigeria.

Nonetheless, rural people appear to have reliable indigenous channels and media through which they get information. These channels and media could be exploited for effective conservation communication in rural areas. In doing this, it is important to do a thorough appraisal of the information environment of rural areas. As Soola (1993, p. 83) counsels in his article on communication with the rural farmer,

> ... An appreciation of the media environment of the rural non-literate farmer and information flow within that environment is thus vital for not only meaningful communication with him but also for getting him to adopt the new practices being recommended. The rural community is rich in traditional channels of communication if only the communicator is enterprising enough to want to exploit the rich communication resources of this environment.

In rural areas in Africa, information flows mainly through the Indigenous African Communication Systems (IACS), which is what Soola refers to as traditional communication. IACS have also been variously referred to as Oramedia (Ugboajah 1985) and folk media (Panford et al, (2001). IACS are 'identifiable ways of sharing ideas, meanings, opinions, and facts of all kinds between and among Africans' (Nwabueze 2006, p.236). They are a fusion of many social conventions and practices and have become sharpened and blended into important communication systems which have almost become standard practice for traditional societies (Wilson, 1990). They are based on 'indigenous culture produced and consumed by members of a group. They reinforce group values and are visible cultural features…' (Ugboajah 1985, 166). "As entertainments they can attract and hold the interest of large numbers of people. As oral media in local languages, they can involve the poorest groups and classes. As dramatic representations of local problems, they can provide a codification of reality which can be used by participants in analysing their situation (Ugboajah 1985, 172).

Music and musical instruments, objects, colour schemes, chants, cryptic writings, symbols, folk theatre, forums and institutions are all forms IACS. However, due to the multi-cultural nature of Africa, there is no uniformly agreed taxonomy of IACS but researchers in the field tend to agree that they (IACS) are credible, authoritative and non-alienating, and derive meaning and relevance within a defined cultural and linguistic context (Ojebode, 2002).

A very important component of IACS is the town crier or the village gong man/ announcer. The town crier, according to Wilson and Itek (2006),

> is symbolically an organizational media worker because he is the megaphone of the community who does not speak or narrowcast information on his own. He is like radio or television newscaster or the newspaper reporter. The only difference is that he is seen flesh and blood by those who care (Cited in Nwammuo 2011, 120)

The town crier usually operates at night or early morning when the environment is quiet and calm. The man or woman (though usually a male) beats the gong to attract attention and then will announce to the village whatever message he/she has for them. One of the advantages of the town crier system is that there is room for immediate feedback as people can seek clarifications from the town crier.

Traditional and religious institutions are important components of IACS that are central for the success of any enlightenment programme in rural areas in Nigeria. The importance of traditional rulers to rural areas is understandable given that they are the custodians of the people's culture. Their houses are sites of power within villages, and their orders are usually carried out to the latter (Meribe, 2013). Also, given the religious disposition of Nigerians, religious leaders are becoming increasingly influential in the country. While Islamic clerics are influential in the predominantly Moslem northern part of Nigeria, Christian clerics are influential in the predominantly Christian south. Yahya's (2007) observation that a polio vaccination programme in northern Nigeria failed because these two institutions were neglected by the planners further underscores the importance of these institutions to rural enlightenment campaigns.

Clearly, the main advantage of IACS is that they are grounded in the people's culture. They are an integral part of life in traditional African societies. In fact, IACS lubricate life in rural Africa. Mundy and Compton (1995) were therefore right in describing IACS as an important aspect of culture; the means by which a culture is preserved, handed down and adapted.

Nevertheless, IACS also have their shortcomings as highlighted by West and Fair (1993), Thomas (1995) and Udoakah (1996). However, the fact that their communal ownership and accessibility means that, more than the mass media, they can create space for the voices of the rural poor to be heard (Meribe 2013). Hence Des Wilson argues that "the point remains that this is a system that has been with the people, it is a system they are familiar with, this is a system that has worked for them in many circumstances. And this is a system they know..." It was therefore not surprising that most of the rural people interviewed preferred to be educated on conservation issues in the village square where they would ask question should they fail to understand what was being taught

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Not surprisingly, the views of rural dwellers interviewed for this project suggested that the mass media and the new media only cannot be relied on to successfully engage rural people in conservation of biodiversity. For instance,

one of the farmers, Dennis Nnaji, said that newspapers were not sold in the rural community and that he listened to radio programmes sparingly because he would leave for his farm in the morning and return in the night. He did say, however, that he got news of daily occurrences from other members of the community and also from the church. This indicates that rural people do not necessarily rely on the mass media for news but have local networks which they rely on for local and national news.

When asked the medium they would prefer to be used in enlightening them on environmental issues most of the farmers did not choose the mass media – not even radio, which is acclaimed as very effective in rural communication (Moemeka 1980; Nwaerondu and Thompson 1987; Nsi 1993). For example, one respondent, Martha Ogbu, said:

> I will say that they should not use radio to teach us because if they use radio, it will not be possible for me to seek clarifications when I don't understand what they are saying. But when they come around from time to time to discuss the issue with us, whenever I'm lost I will ask question Martha Ogbu – interview with the author).

For David Okenwa, another rural dweller, the absence of electricity in rural areas was likely to frustrate engagement with rural people through the mass media as only few people might listen to or watch the programme. According to him:

> The problem with radio and TV is that some of us live in the part of the village that does not have electricity. If you use radio and TV to talk about it we may not hear about it. So, it will be good to come here and talk to us about it (David Okenwa – interview with the researcher).

Even journalists covering the environment were of the view that environmental issues were secondary to the media in Nigeria, thus confirming the findings of Nwabueze (2007) and Okoro & Nnaji (2012). For example, Akeem Lasisi, the features editor of Nigeria's most widely read newspaper, The Punch, observed:

In a country where you have what looks like priority issues, that is, things that have effects that can be immediately felt, it follows that those other phenomena [like environment issues] whose impacts sound distant or whose impact people are not yet familiar will be somehow in the background (Akeem Lasisi – interview with the author)

However, the desire to remain in business also shuts out environment stories from the media. The media need revenue to survive and environment stories rarely bring in revenue. This is understandable, given today's declining newsroom budget (Debrett, 2011). The editor of Nigeria's Guardian Newspaper, Martin Oloja, puts it this way:

> Definitely, nobody invests in a newspaper as a joker or to lose. Newspaper is business and if you do not consider the interest of

> the advertiser and the readers, you are finished. Yes, you can say public interest, but which public, whose public? The investor wants what management people and business educationists call return on investment (RoI)... The editor is not an island unto himself. The editor will look at the market situation, the readership, the sophistication of the environment or lack of it, the mediocrity in the system and the taste of the readers, before deciding which story goes where...So, you will consider if you will sell if you continue to fill the pages with science issues, technology issues, environmental issues over and above political stories which most readers that have the purchasing power prefer.

In other words, editors want to generate revenue for the proprietors of their organisations and they have an idea of the type of news that will attract the type of audience they desire. Overtime, the reporters will learn the news preferences of the editors and tailor their reports towards them. As Beder (1997) explains, editors represent the owners in the news room, and journalists quickly learn which stories are likely to be run and internalize this message as a form of self-censorship.

In any case, the rural dwellers interviewed for this work expressed their preference for IACS. They believed it was the easiest way to educate a large number of them at the same time- especially when the educators or communicators worked in concert with the Igwe (the traditional ruler). One of rural dwellers, Martha Ogbu, explained:

> If you want to talk to the whole community then you have to tell the igwe (traditional ruler). He is the only one who can easily make everyone in the community to gather at the village square. He will simply tell the town crier and he will announce that every adult should gather at the village square at a certain date and time. Of course everyone will gather because most of the time there will be sanctions for or fines to be paid by those who will be absent without genuine reasons. (Martha Ogbu – interview with the author).

She said that it would be better for any initiative aimed at enlightening them on issues bearing on the environment to visit the village and talk to them face-to-face. This, according to her, would mean that "everybody will relay their experience and we will learn. Personally, that will be better for me because whatever I don't understand I will ask question". Another rural dweller, Juliana Okorie, echoed Ogbu's view but also highlighted other reasons why the mass media should not be relied on in communication with rural people.

I do not listen to radio every time, especially because we don't always have electricity. And you know that electricity is not like lantern or candle light which you will go and light by yourself. Besides a farmer, I leave in the house very early in the morning and come back late in the evening... I will prefer to be the

teachers to teach me in face-to-face setting. There is no doubt that I will learn better when I am seeing my teacher and my teacher is seeing me (Juliana Okorie – interview with the researcher).

The executive director of Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team (NEXT), an environment - based NGO, Professor Chinedum Nwajiuba, also underscored the usefulness of IACS in communication with rural people. He observed that in most communities where they organised workshops, "we also try to engage the local communication organs, which are indigenous to the people, for all our workshops, meetings and engagements with the communities". According to him, "for each community we find a local means of communication suited to them and we employ that in order to get them to work with us".

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Rural Nigeria is still very traditional – and traditional societies hold tight to their culture. This means that conservation information will make more sense to rural people in Nigeria if communicated to them through the media that the people identify with. Certainly, conservation is a development issue. Research in development studies has shown that development succeeds when it begins with respect for indigenous knowledge and tradition (Breidlid 2009, p.142). In fact, it is increasingly being recognised that development campaigns that pay attention to local perceptions and ways are more likely to be successful' (Sillitoe, 1998). Besides, the principles and practice of conservation are not antithetical to African culture as they are firmly rooted in indigenous values that guided Africa's overall development for generations. For example, forests are preserved for spiritual and economic purposes and African societies have sanctions for those who fail to observe the laws governing the use of the forests (Nwankwo and Richards, 2004).

Since the major reason for conservation communication in rural Nigeria is to encourage people to recognise the benefits of conservation for the future of humankind, it is important that we go beyond mere provision of information and begin to engage them. The mass media and the internet, from the discussions, cannot be used to satisfactorily engage the rural people in Nigeria. A conservation communication strategy that leverages on the people's culture will enable "new knowledge and skills, and attitudes to be introduced within the framework of existing knowledge, cultural patterns, institutions, values and human resources" (Colletta 1980, p. 17). That is why it is said that the level of development in a community can be traced to the degree of value accorded its cultural system and practices (Odebiyi, 2010). Certainly, knowledge is the foundation of every form of development. Therefore, for conservation to be appreciated in rural Africa it must be linked to indigenous knowledge (Viriri, 2009), which itself is passed down from generation to generation through IACS (Mundy and Compton 1995).

The interview with the rural people also revealed the influence of the Igwe (traditional ruler) in the community, thus underscoring the centrality of the

traditional institution to rural enlightenment. Indeed, the African "rural society depends to a large extent on the authority image which pervades her social and political system. Indeed, this authority image can assist in the communication of conservation to the rural society" (Wilson 1987, p. 41). Not involving the traditional rulers and other opinion leaders may frustrate conservation communication efforts in rural areas (Meribe 2013).

One other way to make conservation meaningful to uneducated rural people is by adapting it to theatre performance (Nda & Ekong 2012). Compelling performances on the theme of conservation can make "the invisible, often abstract concept of climate change tangible" (Corner 2013) for the rural illiterate. Indeed, theatre, as Batta (2008) observes, 'can be used to create awareness, sensitise people on the problem, drum up support for remedial action, dramatise the situation and sketch what people can do" (referenced in Obot 2012, p. 500) about conservation.

Indeed, conservationists need to widen the definition of their media to include IACS, as combining their advantages with those of the mass media and the new media of the internet will no doubt offer new opportunities for conservation communication in Africa. The technological deficiencies of IACS, therefore, should be complemented by the technological advantages of the mass media (Wilson, 1997).

However, one believes that the socio-cultural milieu of each rural area should determine the approach to be adopted in conservation communication. In other words, the complexity of each locality should determine the degree to which modern mass media and IACS could be combined in rural development. This thus calls for delicate balancing by development agencies. As McBride et al (1980, p. 82) counsel, 'the main challenge to both policy makers and communication practitioners is to find a formula to preserve the relationship between traditional (IACS) and modern forms of communication without damaging the traditional ways nor obstructing the necessary march towards modernity' .

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